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# English Grammar



*pronoun*  
*superlative*  
*linking verb*  
*the passive*  
*sentence connector*  
*reporting verb*  
*question tag*

**Digital Edition**

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English  
Grammar

## 2 Giving information about people and things: adjectives, numbers, and other modifiers

### Introduction

**2.1** In the previous chapter the use of nouns, pronouns, and determiners to name and identify people and things was explained. This chapter explains ways of giving more information about the people and things that have already been named or identified.

One way of giving more information within a noun phrase about people or things is by the use of an **adjective**, such as *small*, *political*, or *blue*. Adjectives can be used as modifiers of a noun or after linking verbs. They are explained in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.168.

Sometimes, **nouns**, rather than adjectives, are used to modify the noun. This is explained in paragraphs 2.169 to 2.174.

There are other groups of words that are used before a noun phrase to give more information about people and things. They are linked to the noun phrase by *of*. These include certain **indefinite determiners** such as *many of* and *some of* (explained in paragraphs 2.176 to 2.193), and other expressions that are used for describing a part or amount of something, such as *a piece of* and *a bottle of* (explained in paragraphs 2.194 to 2.207).

**Numbers** and **fractions** are also used to indicate the amount of people or things you are talking about. Numbers are explained in paragraphs 2.208 to 2.239 and fractions are explained in paragraphs 2.240 to 2.249.

The other way of giving more information within a noun phrase about people or things is by using a **qualifier**, that is, giving extra information in the form of a phrase or a clause after the noun to expand its meaning. This is explained in paragraphs 2.272 to 2.302.

### Describing people and things: adjectives

**2.2** When you want to give more information about something than you can give by using a noun alone, you can use an **adjective** to identify it or describe it in more detail.

...*a new idea*.

...*new ideas*.

...*new creative ideas*.

*Ideas are important*.

...*to suggest that new ideas are useful*.

## main points about adjectives

- 2.3** The most important things to notice about an adjective in English are
- ▶ what structure it is in (e.g. before a noun or after a linking verb)
  - ▶ what type of adjective it is (e.g. describing a quality or placing the noun in a particular class).

### ! BE CAREFUL

- 2.4** The form of an adjective does not change: you use the same form for singular and plural and for subject and object.

*We were looking for a good place to camp.*

*The next good place was forty-five miles further on.*

*Good places to fish were hard to find.*

*We found hardly any good places.*

## structure

- 2.5** Adjectives are nearly always used in connection with a noun or pronoun to give information about the person, thing, or group that is being referred to. When this information is not the main purpose of a statement, adjectives are placed in front of a noun, as in *hot coffee*.

The use of adjectives in a noun phrase is explained in paragraph 2.19.

- 2.6** Sometimes, however, the main purpose of a statement is to give the information expressed by an adjective. When this happens, adjectives are placed after a **linking verb** such as *be* or *become*, as in *I am cold* and *He became ill*. The use of adjectives after a linking verb is explained in paragraphs 3.122 to 3.137.

## types of adjective

- 2.7** There is a large group of adjectives that identify qualities that someone or something has. This group includes words such as *happy* and *intelligent*. These are called **qualitative adjectives**.

Qualitative adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.22 to 2.25.

- 2.8** There is another large group of adjectives that identify someone or something as a member of a class. This group includes words such as *financial* and *intellectual*. These are called **classifying adjectives**.

Classifying adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.26 to 2.28.

Some adjectives are both qualitative and classifying. These are explained in paragraph 2.29.

- 2.9** There is a small group of adjectives that identify the colour of something. This group includes words like *blue* and *green*. They are called **colour**

## adjectives.

Colour adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.30 to 2.35.

- 2.10** Another small group of adjectives are used to emphasize your feelings about the person or thing you are talking about. These adjectives are called **emphasizing adjectives**, and they include adjectives such as *complete*, *absolute*, and *utter*.

Emphasizing adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.36 to 2.39.

- 2.11** There is a small group of adjectives that are used in a very similar way to **determiners** (see paragraphs 1.162 to 1.251) to make the reference more precise.

These are called **postdeterminers** because their place in a noun phrase is immediately after the determiner, if there is one, and before any other adjectives.

Postdeterminers are explained in paragraph 2.40.

## structural restrictions

- 2.12** Most adjectives can be used either before the noun or after a linking verb. However, there are some that can be used only in one position or the other. This is explained in paragraphs 2.41 to 2.53.

- 2.13** There are a few adjectives that can be used immediately after the noun. They are explained in paragraphs 2.58 to 2.62.

## order of adjectives

- 2.14** When two or more adjectives are used in a structure, they usually occur in a particular order. This is explained in paragraphs 2.54 to 2.57.

## -ing and -ed adjectives

- 2.15** There are a large number of English adjectives ending in *-ing*, many of which are related to the **-ing participle** of a verb. In this grammar they are called **-ing adjectives**.

There are also a large number of English adjectives ending in *-ed*, many of which are related to the **-ed participle** of a verb. In this grammar they are called **-ed adjectives**.

*-ing* adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.63 to 2.76. *-ed* adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.77 to 2.93.

## compound adjectives

- 2.16** **Compound adjectives** are made up of two or more words, usually written with hyphens between them.

Compound adjectives are explained in paragraphs 2.94 to 2.102.

### comparing things

**2.17** When you want to compare the amount of a quality that two or more people or things have, you can use **comparative** and **superlative** adjectives. There are also some other ways of comparing things.

Comparatives are explained in paragraphs 2.103 to 2.111, and superlatives are explained in paragraphs 2.112 to 2.122. Other ways of comparing things are explained in paragraphs 2.123 to 2.139.

### talking about the amount of a quality

**2.18** You can also talk about the amount of a quality that something or someone has by using an adverb like *totally* or *mildly* with an adjective.

This is explained in paragraphs 2.141 to 2.168.

### Adjective structures

**2.19** Adjectives are used in two main structures. One of them involves adjectives coming before the noun phrase. If you say *Julia was carrying an old suitcase*, your main purpose is to say that Julia was carrying a suitcase. The adjective *old* gives more information about what kind of suitcase it was.

*He was wearing a white t-shirt.*

*...a technical term.*

*...a pretty little star-shaped flower bed.*

Most adjectives can be used in this way.

**2.20** The other main structure involves adjectives being used after **linking verbs** such as *be* and *become*. Putting an adjective after a linking verb has the effect of focusing attention on the adjective. If you say *The suitcase she was carrying was old*, your main purpose is to describe the suitcase, so the focus is on the adjective *old*.

*The roads are busy.*

*The house was quiet.*

*He became angry.*

*I feel cold.*

*Nobody seemed amused.*

The use of adjectives after linking verbs is explained in paragraphs 3.132 to 3.137.

Most adjectives can be used in this way.

**2.21** In the following examples, the first example in each pair shows an adjective being used before the noun, while the second example shows it being used with a linking verb.

There was no clear evidence.  
'That's very clear,' I said.  
It had been a pleasant evening.  
It's not a big stream, but it's very pleasant.  
She bought a loaf of white bread.  
The walls were white.

## Identifying qualities: a sad story, a pretty girl

**2.22** There are two main types of adjective, **qualitative** and **classifying**. Adjectives that describe a quality that someone or something has, such as *sad*, *pretty*, *small*, *happy*, *healthy*, *wealthy*, and *wise*, are called **qualitative adjectives**.

...a sad story.  
...a pretty girl.  
...a small child.  
...a happy mother with a healthy baby.  
...wealthy bankers.  
I think it would be wise to give up.

gradability: *very sad*, *rather funny*

- 2.23** Adjectives that describe qualities are **gradable**, which means that the person or thing referred to can have more or less of the quality mentioned.
- 2.24** The usual way in which you show the amount of a quality that something or someone has is by using adverbs like *very* and *rather* in front of qualitative adjectives. This is explained in paragraphs [2.140](#) to [2.156](#).
- 2.25** The other way in which you can talk about the amount of a quality that something or someone has is by using a **comparative**, such as *bigger* and *more interesting*, or a **superlative**, such as *the biggest* and *the most interesting*. Comparatives and superlatives are explained in paragraphs [2.103](#) to [2.122](#). Here is a list of qualitative adjectives:

active  
angry  
anxious  
appropriate  
attractive  
bad  
beautiful

big  
brief  
bright  
broad  
busy  
calm  
careful  
cheap  
clean  
clear  
close  
cold  
comfortable  
common  
complex  
cool  
curious  
dangerous  
dark  
dear  
deep  
determined  
different  
difficult  
dirty  
dry  
easy  
effective  
efficient  
expensive  
fair

familiar

famous

fast

fat

fine

firm

flat

frank

free

fresh

friendly

frightened

funny

good

great

happy

hard

heavy

high

hot

important

interesting

kind

large

late

light

likely

long

loose

loud

lovely

low  
lucky  
narrow  
nervous  
new  
nice  
obvious  
odd  
old  
pale  
patient  
plain  
pleasant  
poor  
popular  
powerful  
pretty  
proud  
quick  
quiet  
rare  
reasonable  
rich  
rough  
sad  
safe  
sensible  
serious  
sharp  
shocked  
short

sick  
significant  
silly  
simple  
slow  
small  
soft  
special  
steady  
strange  
strong  
stupid  
successful  
suitable  
sure  
surprised  
sweet  
tall  
terrible  
thick  
thin  
tight  
tiny  
tired  
typical  
understanding  
useful  
violent  
warm  
weak  
wet

wide  
wild  
worried  
young

### Identifying type: *financial help*, *abdominal pains*

**2.26** The other main type of adjective consists of adjectives that you use to identify the type or *class* that something belongs to. For example, if you say *financial help*, you are using the adjective *financial* to describe what type of help you are talking about (that is, to *classify* help). Adjectives that are used in this way are called **classifying adjectives**.

...*financial* help.

...*abdominal* pains.

...*a medieval* manuscript.

...*my daily* shower.

...*an equal* partnership.

...*a sufficient* amount of milk.

Note that **noun modifiers** (see paragraphs 2.169 to 2.174) are used in a similar way to classifying adjectives. For example, *financial matters* and *money matters* are similar in both structure and meaning.

Here is a list of classifying adjectives:

absolute  
active  
actual  
agricultural  
alternative  
annual  
apparent  
available  
basic  
central  
chemical  
civil  
commercial

communist  
conservative  
cultural  
daily  
democratic  
direct  
domestic  
double  
due  
east  
eastern  
economic  
educational  
electric  
empty  
external  
female  
financial  
foreign  
free  
full  
general  
golden  
historical  
human  
ideal  
independent  
industrial  
inevitable  
intellectual  
internal

international

legal

local

magic

male

medical

mental

military

modern

moral

national

natural

negative

north

northern

nuclear

official

open

original

personal

physical

political

positive

possible

potential

private

professional

proper

psychological

public

raw

ready  
real  
religious  
revolutionary  
right  
royal  
rural  
scientific  
separate  
sexual  
single  
social  
solid  
south  
southern  
standard  
straight  
sufficient  
theoretical  
traditional  
urban  
west  
western  
wooden  
wrong

**2.27** Adjectives such as *British*, *American*, and *Australian*, that indicate nationality or origin, are also classifying adjectives. They start with a capital letter because they are related to names of countries.

...American citizens.

Some classifying adjectives are formed from people's names, for example *Victorian* and *Shakespearean*. They also start with a capital letter.

...Victorian houses.

ready  
real  
religious  
revolutionary  
right  
royal  
rural  
scientific  
separate  
sexual  
single  
social  
solid  
south  
southern  
standard  
straight  
sufficient  
theoretical  
traditional  
urban  
west  
western  
wooden  
wrong

**2.27** Adjectives such as *British*, *American*, and *Australian*, that indicate nationality or origin, are also classifying adjectives. They start with a capital letter because they are related to names of countries.

...American citizens.

Some classifying adjectives are formed from people's names, for example *Victorian* and *Shakespearean*. They also start with a capital letter.

...Victorian houses.

**2.28** Because they put something in a class, classifying adjectives are not **gradable** in the way that qualitative adjectives are. For example, if you do not have to pay for something, you cannot say that it is *very free*, or *rather free*. Things are either in a particular class or not in it. Therefore, classifying adjectives do not have comparatives and superlatives and are not normally used with adverbs like *very* and *rather*.

However, when you want to show that you feel strongly about what you are saying, you can use an *intensifying* adverb such as *absolutely* with a classifying adjective. This is explained in paragraphs [2.147](#) to [2.148](#).

### adjectives that are of both types

**2.29** Some adjectives can be either **qualitative** or **classifying** depending on the meaning. For example, in *an emotional person*, *emotional* is a qualitative adjective meaning *feeling or expressing strong emotions*; it has a comparative and superlative and it can be used with words like *very* and *rather*. Thus, a person can be *very emotional*, *rather emotional*, or *more emotional* than someone else. However, in *the emotional needs of children*, *emotional* is a classifying adjective meaning *relating to a person's emotions*, and so it cannot be used with words like *very* or *rather*, and it does not have a comparative and superlative.

Here is a list of adjectives that are often used both as qualitative adjectives and as classifying adjectives:

- academic
- conscious
- dry
- educational
- effective
- emotional
- extreme
- late
- modern
- moral
- objective
- ordinary
- regular

religious  
revolutionary  
rural  
scientific  
secret  
similar  
social

## Identifying colours: colour adjectives

**2.30** When you want to say what colour something is, you use a **colour adjective**.

...*her blue eyes.*

...*a red ribbon.*

Here is a list of the main colour adjectives:

black  
blue  
brown  
cream  
green  
grey  
orange  
pink  
purple  
red  
scarlet  
violet  
white  
yellow

## adding extra information to colour adjectives

**2.31** If you want to specify a colour more precisely, you use a word such as *light*, *pale*, *dark*, *deep*, or *bright*, in front of a colour adjective.

...light brown hair.  
...a pale green suit.  
...a dark blue dress.  
...deep red dye.  
...her bright blue eyes.

These combinations sometimes have hyphens.

...a light-blue suit.  
...the plant's tiny pale-pink flowers.

Note that these words cannot be used with the colours *black* or *white*, because you cannot have different shades of black and white.

## approximate colours

**2.32** If you want to talk about a colour that does not have a definite name you can:

► use a colour adjective with *-ish* added to the end

...greenish glass.  
...yellowish hair.

► combine two colour adjectives, often with *-ish* or *-y* on the end of the first one

...greenish-white flowers.  
...a greeny blue line.  
...the blue-green waves.



## BE CREATIVE

**2.33** You can mix colours in these ways to produce whatever new colour you are trying to describe.

## comparison of colour adjectives

**2.34** Colour adjectives such as *blue* and *green* occasionally have comparatives and superlatives ending in *-er* and *-est*.

*His face was redder than usual.*  
...the bluest sky I have ever seen.

**Comparatives** and **superlatives** are explained in paragraphs 2.103 to 2.122.

## colour nouns

**2.35** Colours can also be nouns, and the main colours can also be plural nouns.

*The snow shadows had turned to a deep blue.*  
*They blended in so well with the khaki and reds of the landscape.*  
...brilliantly coloured in reds, yellows, blacks, and purples.

## Showing strong feelings: *complete*, *absolute*, etc.

**2.36** You can emphasize your feelings about something that you mention by putting an adjective such as *complete*, *absolute*, or *utter* in front of a noun.

*He made me feel like a complete idiot.*

*Some of it was absolute rubbish.*

*...utter despair.*

*...pure bliss.*


You generally use an adjective of this kind only when the noun shows your opinion about something.

Because they are used to show strong feelings, these adjectives are called **emphasizing adjectives**.

Here is a list of emphasizing adjectives:

absolute  
complete  
entire  
outright  
perfect  
positive  
pure  
real  
total  
true  
utter

## adjectives for showing disapproval

**2.37**  A small group of adjectives ending in *-ing* are used in very informal spoken English for emphasis, usually to show disapproval or contempt.

*Everybody in the whole stinking town was loaded with money.*

*Shut that blinking door!*

Here is a list of adjectives used informally for emphasis:

blinking  
blithering

blooming  
blundering  
crashing  
flaming  
freezing  
piddling  
raving  
scalding  
stinking  
thumping  
thundering  
whopping



#### BE CAREFUL

**2.38** Many of these adjectives are usually used with one particular noun or adjective after them: *blithering idiot*, *blundering idiot*, *crashing bore*, *raving lunatic*, *thundering nuisance*, *freezing cold*, *scalding hot*, *piddling little ...*, *thumping great ...*, *whopping great ...*

*He's driving that car like a raving lunatic!*

*I've got a stinking cold.*

*...a piddling little car.*

#### very as an emphasizing adjective

**2.39** The word *very* is sometimes used to emphasize a noun, in expressions like *the very top* and *the very end*.

*...at the very end of the shop.*

*...the very bottom of the hill.*

*These molecules were formed at the very beginning of history.*

#### Making the reference more precise: postdeterminers

**2.40** There is a small group of adjectives that are used in a very similar way to **determiners** (see paragraphs 1.162 to 1.251) to make the reference more precise. These are called **postdeterminers**, because their place in a noun phrase is immediately after the determiner, if there is one, and before any other adjectives.

*...the following brief description.*

...certain basic human qualities.

...improvements in the last few years.

...further technological advance. He wore his usual old white coat....

...the only sensible thing to do.

You often need to make it clear precisely what you are referring to. For example, if you say *Turn left at the tall building* someone might ask which tall building you mean. If you say *Turn left at the next tall building*, there can be no doubt which one you mean. The postdeterminer *next* picks it out precisely.

Here is a list of adjectives that are postdeterminers:

additional

certain

chief

entire

existing

first

following

further

last

main

next

only

opposite

other

particular

past

present

previous

principal

remaining

same

special

specific

usual

Some of these adjectives are also ordinary classifying adjectives.

*He had children from a previous marriage.*

*There are two main reasons for this.*

Here is a list of postdeterminers that are also classifying adjectives:

additional

chief

existing

further

main

other

particular

past

previous

principal

remaining

specific

Adjectives that are used to show the position of something are also used for precise reference.

*...the middle button of her black leather coat.*

*...the top 100 German companies.*

Here is a list of adjectives sometimes used to talk about the position of something as well as for precise reference:

left

right

upper

lower

top

bottom

middle  
end  
front  
back

Postdeterminers can also be used with numbers. This is explained in paragraph [2.219](#).

## Special classes of adjectives

**2.41** Most adjectives can be used both before the noun and after a linking verb, but there are some that are only used in one position or the other.

There are a few adjectives that are always or almost always used in front of a noun and are never or rarely used after a linking verb. These adjectives are called **attributive adjectives**.

Examples are *atomic* and *outdoor*. You can talk about *an atomic explosion*, but you do not say *The explosion was atomic*. You can talk about *outdoor pursuits*, but you do not say *Their pursuits are outdoor*.

### adjectives that are only used in front of a noun

**2.42** A few **qualitative adjectives** (see paragraphs [2.22](#) to [2.25](#)) are only used in front of a noun. Here is a list of qualitative adjectives always used in this way:

adoring  
belated  
chequered  
choked  
commanding  
fateful  
flagrant  
fleeting  
knotty  
paltry  
punishing  
ramshackle

scant  
searing  
thankless  
unenviable

Most adjectives that are only used in front of a noun are **classifying adjectives** (see paragraphs [2.26](#) to [2.28](#)). Here is a list of classifying adjectives used attributively:

atomic  
bridal  
cardiac  
countless  
cubic  
digital  
east  
eastern  
eventual  
existing  
federal  
forensic  
indoor  
institutional  
introductory  
investigative  
judicial  
lone  
maximum  
nationwide  
neighbouring  
north  
northern

occasional  
orchestral  
outdoor  
phonetic  
preconceived  
remedial  
reproductive  
smokeless  
south  
southern  
subterranean  
supplementary  
underlying  
west  
western  
woollen

**2.43** There are no **colour adjectives** (see paragraphs 2.30 to 2.35) that are restricted to this position.

**Emphasizing adjectives** (see paragraphs 2.36 to 2.39) are usually used in front of a noun.

#### adjectives that always follow a linking verb

**2.44** Some adjectives are normally used only after a linking verb and not in front of a noun. These adjectives are called **predicative adjectives**.

For example, you can say *She felt glad*, but you do not normally talk about *a glad woman*.

Here is a list of adjectives usually used in this way:

afraid  
alive  
alone  
apart  
asleep

awake  
aware  
content  
due  
glad  
ill  
likely  
ready  
safe  
sorry  
sure  
unable  
unlikely  
well

Note that they do not have to be followed by a prepositional phrase.

- 2.45** Some adjectives are usually followed by a prepositional phrase because their meaning would otherwise be unclear or incomplete. For example, you cannot simply say that someone is *accustomed*. You have to say that they are *accustomed to* something.

The following usage note explains which prepositions you use after a particular adjective.

 **USAGE NOTE**

- 2.46** There are a few adjectives that are followed by the preposition *to* when they are used after a linking verb.

*She's allergic to cats.*

*Older people are particularly susceptible to heart problems.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are usually or always used after a linking verb and are followed by *to*:

accustomed  
adjacent  
allergic

attributable  
attuned  
averse  
close  
conducive  
devoted  
impervious  
injurious  
integral  
prone  
proportional  
proportionate  
reconciled  
related  
resigned  
resistant  
similar  
subject  
subservient  
susceptible  
unaccustomed

**2.47** There are a few adjectives that are followed by the preposition *of* when they are used after a linking verb.

*He was aware of the danger that faced him.*

*They seemed capable of winning their first game of the season.*

*He was devoid of any talent whatsoever.*

*His mind seemed to have become incapable of any thought.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are usually or always used after a linking verb and are followed by *of*:

aware  
bereft

capable  
characteristic  
desirous  
devoid  
fond  
full  
heedless  
illustrative  
incapable  
indicative  
mindful  
reminiscent  
representative

- 2.48** There are a few adjectives that are followed by the preposition *with* when they are used after a linking verb.

*His surprise became tinged with disbelief.*

*The plastic has to be compatible with the body tissues that make contact with it.*

*This way of life is fraught with danger.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are usually or always used after a linking verb and are followed by *with*:

compatible  
consonant  
conversant  
filled  
fraught  
riddled  
tinged

- 2.49** Some adjectives are followed by other prepositions when they are used after a linking verb.

*These ideas are rooted in self-deception.*

*Didn't you say the raid was contingent on the weather?*

*Darwin concluded that people were descended from apes.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are usually or always used after a linking verb and are followed by the preposition indicated:

contingent on  
descended from  
inherent in  
lacking in  
rooted in  
steeped in  
swathed in  
unhampered by

In some cases, there is a choice between two prepositions.


*Many of their courses are connected with industry.*

*Such names were arbitrarily given and were not connected to any particular event.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are usually or always used after a linking verb and that are followed by the prepositions shown:

answerable for  
answerable to  
burdened by  
burdened with  
connected to  
connected with  
dependent on  
dependent upon  
immune from  
immune to  
inclined to

inclined towards  
incumbent on  
incumbent upon  
insensible of  
insensible to  
intent on  
intent upon  
parallel to  
parallel with  
reliant on  
reliant upon  
stricken by  
stricken with

**2.50**  *Different* is most commonly followed by *from*. It is also sometimes followed by *to* in British English or *than* in American English.  
*Students today are different from the students ten years ago.*

### adjectives followed by *to*-infinitive clauses

**2.51** To complete the meaning of some adjectives that are used predicatively, you need to follow with a clause beginning with a ***to*-infinitive**. For example, you cannot just say *He is unable*. You have to add a clause beginning with *to*-infinitive such as *to do*: *He is unable to do it*. ***To*-infinitive clauses** are explained in the Reference Section.

*They were unable to help her.*

*I am willing to try.*

*She is bound to notice there's something wrong.*

*I'm inclined to agree with the minister.*

Here is a list of adjectives that are always or nearly always followed by a *to*-infinitive clause:

able  
bound  
destined  
doomed

due  
fated  
fit  
inclined  
liable  
likely  
loath  
prepared  
unable  
unwilling  
willing

**2.52** You can also use a clause beginning with a *to*-infinitive after many other adjectives to give more information about something.

*I was afraid to go home.*

*I was happy to see them again.*

*He was powerless to prevent it.*

*I was almost ashamed to tell her.*

*The path was easy to follow.*

Note that the subject of the main clause is also the subject of the *to*-infinitive clause.

### adjectives followed by *that*-clauses

**2.53** When adjectives that refer to someone's beliefs or feelings are used after a linking verb, they are often followed by a ***that*-clause** (see paragraphs 8.119 to 8.121). The subject of the *that*-clause is not always the same as the subject of the main clause, so you need to specify it.

*She was sure that he meant it.*

*He was frightened that something terrible might be said.*

*I'm aware that I reached a rather large audience through the book.*

Note that the word *that* is not always used in a *that*-clause.

*They were sure she had been born in the city.*

Here is a list of common adjectives often followed by a *that*-clause:

afraid  
angry

anxious  
aware  
certain  
confident  
frightened  
glad  
happy  
pleased  
proud  
sad  
sorry  
sure  
surprised  
unaware  
upset  
worried

Note that all of these adjectives except *angry*, *aware*, *unaware*, *upset*, and *worried* can also be followed by a *to*-infinitive.

*I was afraid that she might not be able to bear the strain.*

*Don't be afraid to ask questions.*

*She was surprised that I knew about it.*

*The twins were very surprised to see Ralph.*

## Position of adjectives in noun phrases

**2.54** When you use more than one adjective in a noun phrase, the usual order for the adjectives is: qualitative adjectives, followed by colour adjectives, followed by classifying adjectives.

...a little white wooden house.

...pretty black lacy dresses.

...a large circular pool of water.

...a beautiful pink suit.

...rapid technological advance.

...a nice red apple.

...the black triangular fin.

This order is nearly always followed in English. Occasionally however, when

you want to focus on a particular characteristic of the person or thing you are describing, you can vary this order, especially when one of the adjectives refers to colour or size.

*...a square black hole.*

Note that you sometimes put a comma or *and* between adjectives. This is explained in paragraphs 8.180 to 8.186 and paragraph 8.201.

*...the long, low caravan.*

*It was a long and tedious business.*

**2.55 Comparatives** (see paragraphs 2.103 to 2.111) and **superlatives** (see paragraphs 2.112 to 2.122) normally come in front of all other adjectives in a noun phrase.

*...better parental control.*

*...the highest monthly figures on record.*

### position of noun modifiers and adjectives

**2.56** When a noun phrase contains both an adjective and a noun modifier (see paragraphs 2.169 to 2.174) the adjective is placed in front of the noun modifier.

*...the booming European car industry.*

*...the world's biggest and most prestigious book fair.*

### two or more adjectives after a linking verb

**2.57** When you use two adjectives after a linking verb, you use a conjunction, usually *and*, to link them. If you use more than two adjectives, you usually put a conjunction such as *and* between the last two adjectives and commas between the others. This is fully explained in paragraphs 8.180 to 8.186 and paragraph 8.201.

*The room was large and square.*

*We felt hot, tired, and thirsty.*

Note that you put the adjectives in the order that you think is the most important.

### adjectives after nouns

**2.58** There are a few adjectives that are usually or always used after a noun. Here is a list showing the different groups of adjectives used after a noun:

designate

elect

galore

incarnate  
manqué  
~  
broad  
deep  
high  
long  
old  
tall  
thick  
wide  
~  
concerned  
involved  
present  
proper  
responsible  
~  
affected  
available  
required  
suggested

#### USAGE NOTE

**2.59** The adjectives *designate*, *elect*, *galore*, *incarnate*, and *manqué* are only used immediately after a noun.

*She was now president elect.*

*There are empty houses galore.*

**2.60** The adjectives *broad*, *deep*, *high*, *long*, *old*, *tall*, *thick*, and *wide* are used immediately after measurement nouns when giving the size, duration, or age of a thing or person. This use is fully explained in paragraph [2.253](#).

*...six feet tall.*

*...three metres wide.*

...twenty five years old.

- 2.61** The adjectives *concerned*, *involved*, *present*, *responsible*, and *proper* have different meanings depending on whether you put them in front of a noun or immediately after one. For example, *the concerned mother* describes a mother who is anxious, but *the mother concerned* simply refers to a mother who has just been mentioned.

...the approval of interested and concerned parents.

The idea needs to come from the individuals concerned.

All this became a very involved process.

He knew all of the people involved.

...the present international situation.

Of the 18 people present, I know only one.

...parents trying to act in a responsible manner.

...the person responsible for his death.

...a proper training in how to teach.

...the first round proper of the FA Cup.

- 2.62** The adjectives *affected*, *available*, *required*, and *suggested* can be used in front of a noun or after a noun without any change in meaning.

Newspapers were the only available source of information.

...the number of teachers available.

...the required changes.

You're way below the standard required.

...the cost of the suggested improvements.

The proposals suggested are derived from successful experiments.

Aside from the affected child, the doctor checks every other member of the household.

...the proportion of the population affected.

### Special forms: **-ing** adjectives

- 2.63** There are many adjectives ending in *-ing*. Most of them are related in form to the **-ing participles** of verbs. In this grammar they are called **-ing adjectives**.

He was an amiable, amusing fellow.

He had been up all night attending a dying man.

The **-ing form** is explained in the Reference Section.

### describing an effect

- 2.64** One group of *-ing* adjectives describe the effect that something has on your feelings and ideas, or on the feelings and ideas of people in general.

...an alarming increase in burglaries.

A surprising number of men do not marry.

...a charming house on the outskirts of the town.

...a warm welcoming smile.

- 2.65** These adjectives are normally **qualitative adjectives**. This means that they can be used with a **submodifying adverb** (a word like *very* or *rather*), and have comparatives and superlatives.

...a very convincing example.

There is nothing very surprising in this.

...a very exciting idea.

...a really pleasing evening at the theatre.

When Bernard moans he's much more convincing.

...one of the most boring books I've ever read.

- 2.66** They can be used in front of a noun or after a linking verb.

They can still show amazing loyalty to their parents.

It's amazing what they can do.

...the most terrifying tale ever written.

The present situation is terrifying.

- 2.67** These *-ing* adjectives have a related transitive verb that you use to describe the way someone is affected by something. For example, if you speak of *an alarming increase*, you mean that the increase alarms you. If you speak of *a surprising number*, you mean that the number surprises you.

Here is a list of *-ing* adjectives that describe an effect and that have a similar meaning to the usual meaning of the related verb:

alarming

amazing

amusing

annoying

appalling

astonishing

astounding

bewildering

boring

challenging

charming

compelling

confusing

convincing  
demeaning  
depressing  
devastating  
disappointing  
disgusting  
distracting  
distressing  
disturbing  
embarrassing  
enchanted  
encouraging  
entertaining  
exciting  
frightening  
harassing  
humiliating  
infuriating  
inspiring  
interesting  
intimidating  
intriguing  
menacing  
misleading  
mocking  
overwhelming  
pleasing  
refreshing  
relaxing  
rewarding  
satisfying

shocking  
sickening  
startling  
surprising  
tempting  
terrifying  
threatening  
thrilling  
tiring  
welcoming  
worrying

Transitive verbs are explained in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.25.

#### describing a process or state

**2.68** The other main group of *-ing* adjectives are used to describe a process or state that continues over a period of time.

*...her growing band of supporters.*

*Oil and gas drillers are doing a booming business.*

*...a life of increasing labour and decreasing leisure.*

**2.69** These adjectives are **classifying adjectives**, so they are not used with words like *very* and *rather*. However, adjectives used to identify a process are often modified by adverbs that describe the speed with which the process happens.

*...a fast diminishing degree of personal freedom.*

*...rapidly rising productivity.*

**2.70** These *-ing* adjectives have related intransitive verbs.

Here is a list of *-ing* adjectives that describe a continuing process or state and that have a similar meaning to the usual meaning of the related verb:

ageing  
ailing  
bleeding  
booming  
bursting

decreasing  
diminishing  
dwindling  
dying  
existing  
increasing  
living  
prevailing  
recurring  
reigning  
remaining  
resounding  
rising  
ruling

Intransitive verbs are explained in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.13.

**2.71** These *-ing* adjectives are only used in front of a noun, so when *-ing* forms of intransitive verbs appear after the verb *be* they are actually part of a progressive form.



#### BE CREATIVE

**2.72** In English, you can make most verbs into adjectives by adding *-ing* to the verb and putting it in front of the noun, to say what someone or something is doing.

...a walking figure.

...FIFA, world football's ruling body.

...bands performing in front of screaming crowds.

...two years of falling employment.

...a tremendous noise of smashing glass.

#### form and meaning

**2.73** Most of the *-ing* adjectives talked about so far are related to verbs. Sometimes however, *-ing* adjectives are not related to verbs at all. For example, there is no verb *to neighbour*.

*Whole families came from neighbouring villages.*

Here is a list of *-ing* adjectives that are not related to verbs:

appetizing  
balding  
cunning  
enterprising  
excruciating  
impending  
neighbouring  
scathing  
unwitting

- 2.74** Sometimes, an *-ing* adjective is related to an uncommon use of a verb, or appears to be related to a verb but is not related exactly to any current use. For example, the verb *haunt* is most commonly used in connection with ghosts, but the adjective *haunting* is more often used to talk about such things as songs and memories. A *haunting tune* is a tune you cannot forget. Here is a list of qualitative *-ing* adjectives that are not related to a common transitive use of a verb:

becoming  
bracing  
cutting  
dashing  
disarming  
engaging  
fetching  
halting  
haunting  
moving  
penetrating  
piercing  
pressing  
promising

rambling  
ravishing  
retiring  
revolting  
searching  
taxing  
trying

Here is a list of classifying *-ing* adjectives that are not related to a common intransitive use of a verb:

acting  
driving  
floating  
gathering  
going  
leading  
missing  
running

**2.75** Some adjectives are derived from a verb and a prefix. For example, *outgoing* is derived from the verb *go* and the prefix *out-*. There is no verb *to outgo*.

*Wouldn't that cause a delay in outgoing mail?*

Here is a list of *-ing* adjectives derived from a verb and a prefix:

forthcoming  
incoming  
oncoming  
ongoing  
outgoing  
outstanding  
overarching

overbearing  
uplifting  
upstanding

- 2.76** A small group of *-ing* adjectives are used in informal spoken English for emphasis, usually to express disapproval. This use is explained in paragraphs 2.41 to 2.42.

Some **compound adjectives** (see paragraphs 2.94 to 2.102) end in *-ing*.

### Special forms: *-ed* adjectives

- 2.77** A large number of English adjectives end in *-ed*. Many of them have the same form as the ***-ed* participle** of a verb. Others are formed by adding *-ed* to a noun. Others are not closely related to any other words.

...a disappointed man.

...a bearded man.

...sophisticated electronic devices.

- 2.78** Adjectives with the same form as irregular ***-ed* participles** (see the Reference Section) that do not end in *-ed* are also included here as *-ed* adjectives.

Was it a broken bone, a torn ligament, or what?

The *-ed* participles of some **phrasal verbs** (see paragraphs 3.83 to 3.116) can also be used as adjectives. When they are used in front of a noun, the two parts of the phrasal verb are usually written with a hyphen between them.

...the built-up urban mass of the city.

- 2.79** Most *-ed* adjectives are related to a transitive verb and have a passive meaning. They show that something has happened or is happening to the thing being described. For example, a *frightened person* is a person who has been frightened by something. A *known criminal* is a criminal who is known by the police.

We have a long list of satisfied customers.

We cannot refuse to teach children the required subjects.

### qualitative *-ed* adjectives

- 2.80** *-ed* adjectives that refer to a person's mental or emotional reaction to something are generally qualitative.

He was a worried old man.

...a bored old woman.

...an interested student.

These adjectives can be modified by words such as *very* and *extremely*, just like

other qualitative adjectives (see paragraphs [2.140](#) to [2.156](#)).

## form and meaning

- 2.81** Like other adjectives used for talking about feelings, these adjectives are often used to describe the expression, voice, or manner of the person affected, instead of referring directly to that person.

*...her big blue frightened eyes.*

*She could hear his agitated voice.*

*Barry gave him a worried look.*

- 2.82** Here is a list of qualitative *-ed* adjectives that have a similar meaning to the most common meaning of the related verb:

agitated  
alarmed  
amused  
appalled  
astonished  
bored  
confused  
contented  
delighted  
depressed  
deprived  
disappointed  
disgusted  
disillusioned  
distressed  
embarrassed  
excited  
frightened  
inhibited  
interested  
pleased  
preoccupied

puzzled  
satisfied  
shocked  
surprised  
tired  
troubled  
worried

Here is a list of qualitative *-ed* adjectives that do not have a similar meaning to the usual meaning of the related verb:

animated  
attached  
concerned  
determined  
disposed  
disturbed  
guarded  
hurt  
inclined  
mixed  
strained

### classifying *-ed* adjectives

**2.83** Many other *-ed* adjectives are used for classifying, and so cannot be used with words like *very* and *rather*. For example, *a furnished apartment* is one type of apartment, contrasting with *an apartment without furniture*.

...*a furnished apartment.*

...*a painted wooden bowl.*

...*the closed bedroom door.*

Most adjectives that refer to physical distinctions are classifying adjectives.

**2.84** Here is a list of classifying *-ed* adjectives that have a similar meaning to the most common meaning of the related verb:

abandoned  
armed  
blocked  
boiled  
broken  
canned  
classified  
closed  
concentrated  
condemned  
cooked  
divided  
drawn  
dried  
established  
fixed  
furnished  
haunted  
hidden  
improved  
infected  
integrated  
known  
licensed  
loaded  
paid  
painted  
processed  
reduced  
required  
torn

trained  
united  
wasted

Here is list of *-ed* classifying adjectives that have a different meaning from the most common meaning of the related verb:

advanced  
marked  
noted  
pointed  
spotted  
veiled

### modifying *-ed* adjectives

**2.85** Classifying *-ed* adjectives cannot normally be modified with words like *quite* and *very*. However, an **adverb of manner**, (see paragraphs 6.36 to 6.44) or an **adverb of degree**, (see paragraphs 6.45 to 6.52) is often used before an *-ed* adjective.

For example, *a pleasantly furnished room* is a room that has been furnished with pleasant furniture.

...pleasantly furnished rooms.

...a well-known novelist.

**2.86** Some *-ed* adjectives are not often used on their own, and an adverb is necessary to complete the sense. You do not usually talk about *dressed people*, but you can say that they are *well dressed* or *smartly dressed* for example. The *-ed* adjectives in the following examples nearly always have an adverb in front of them.

...a cautiously worded statement.

...impeccably dressed men.

It was a richly deserved honour.

...superbly cut clothes.

...the existence of a highly developed national press.

...a well organized campaign.

...a tall, powerfully built man.

She gazed down at his perfectly formed little face.

Note that combinations like this are sometimes hyphenated, making them **compound adjectives**.

...a well-equipped army.

### -ed adjectives with an active meaning

**2.87** A few -ed adjectives are related to the -ed participle of intransitive verbs and have an active meaning, not a passive meaning. For example, a *fallen tree* is a tree that has fallen.

...a capsized ship.

She is the daughter of a retired army officer.

...an escaped prisoner.

Here is a list of -ed adjectives with an active meaning:

accumulated

dated

escaped

faded

fallen

retired

swollen

wilted

### -ed adjectives after linking verbs

**2.88** Most -ed adjectives can be used both in front of a noun and after a linking verb.

The worried authorities decided to play safe. My husband was worried.

A small number of -ed adjectives are normally only used after a linking verb. Often, they are followed by a preposition, a *to*-infinitive, or a *that*-clause.

I was thrilled by the exhibition.

The Brazilians are pleased with the results.

...food destined for areas of south Sudan.

He was always prepared to account for his actions.

Here is a list of -ed adjectives often used after a linking verb, with or without a phrase or clause after them:

convinced

delighted  
interested  
intimidated  
intrigued  
involved  
pleased  
prepared  
scared  
thrilled  
tired  
touched

Here is a list of *-ed* adjectives normally used after a linking verb with a phrase or clause after them:

agreed  
destined  
dressed  
finished  
lost  
prepared  
shut  
stuck

#### ★ BE CREATIVE

**2.89** The *-ed* participle of almost any transitive verb can be used as an adjective, though some are more commonly used than others.

*...she said, with a forced smile.*

*There was one paid tutor and three volunteer tutors.*

*The recovered animals will be released.*

*...the final corrected version.*

#### ★ BE CREATIVE

**2.90** Some *-ed* adjectives are formed from nouns. For example, if a living thing has

wings, you can describe it as *winged*. If someone has skills, you can describe them as *skilled*.

...*winged* angels.

...*a skilled* engineer.

*She was dressed in black and carried a black beaded* purse.

...*armoured* cars.

...*the education of gifted* children.

## **-ed adjectives formed from nouns**

**2.91** Here is a list of -ed adjectives formed from nouns:

armoured  
barbed  
beaded  
bearded  
detailed  
flowered  
freckled  
gifted  
gloved  
hooded  
mannered  
pointed  
principled  
salaried  
skilled  
spotted  
striped  
turbaned  
walled  
winged

-ed adjectives formed from nouns are commonly used as the second part of **compound adjectives** (see paragraph 2.94 to 2.102) such as *grey-haired* and

*open-minded.*

## **-ed adjectives unrelated to verbs or nouns**

**2.92** There are also some *-ed* adjectives in regular use that are not related to verbs or nouns in the ways described above. For example, there are no words *parch* or *belove*. There is a noun *concert*, but the adjective *concerted* does not mean *having a concert*.

*He climbed up the dry parched grass to the terrace steps.*

*...a complex and antiquated system of taxation.*

*...attempts to mount a concerted campaign.*

*...the purchase of expensive sophisticated equipment.*

**2.93** Here is a list of *-ed* adjectives that are not related to verbs or nouns:

antiquated  
ashamed  
assorted  
beloved  
bloated  
concerted  
crazed  
deceased  
doomed  
indebted  
parched  
rugged  
sophisticated  
tinned

## **Compound adjectives**

**2.94** **Compound adjectives** are made up of two or more words, usually written with hyphens between them. They may be qualitative, classifying, or colour adjectives.

*I was in a light-hearted mood.*

*She was dressed in a bottle-green party dress.*

*...the built-up urban mass of the city.*

...an air-conditioned restaurant.  
...a good-looking girl.  
...one-way traffic.  
...a part-time job.

## formation patterns

**2.95** These are the most common and least restricted patterns for forming compound adjectives:

- ▶ adjective or number plus noun plus *-ed*, e.g. *grey-haired* and *one-sided*
- ▶ adjective or adverb plus *-ed* participle, e.g. *low-paid* and *well-behaved*
- ▶ adjective, adverb, or noun plus *-ing* participle, e.g. *good-looking*, *long-lasting* and *man-eating*.

Note that compound adjectives describe simple concepts: a *good-looking* person looks good, and a *man-eating* beast eats humans. More complex descriptions in English need to be given using a following phrase or clause.

**2.96** These are less common and more restricted patterns for forming compound adjectives:

- ▶ noun plus *-ed* participle, e.g. *tongue-tied* and *wind-swept*
- ▶ noun plus adjective, e.g. *accident-prone*, *trouble-free*
- ▶ adjective plus noun, e.g. *deep-sea*, *present-day*
- ▶ *-ed* participle plus adverb, e.g. *run-down*, *cast-off*
- ▶ number plus singular countable noun, e.g. *five-page*, *four-door*

Note that compound adjectives formed according to the last of these patterns are always used in front of a noun.

## compound qualitative adjectives

**2.97** Here is a list of compound qualitative adjectives:

able-bodied  
absent-minded  
accident-prone  
big-headed  
clear-cut  
close-fitting  
cold-blooded  
easy-going

far-fetched  
far-reaching  
good-looking  
good-tempered  
hard-up  
hard-wearing  
ill-advised  
kind-hearted  
labour saving  
laid-back  
light-hearted  
long-lasting  
long-standing  
long-suffering  
low-cut  
low-paid  
low-slung  
mind-blowing  
mouth-watering  
muddle-headed  
narrow-minded  
nice-looking  
off-colour  
off-hand  
off-putting  
old-fashioned  
one-sided  
open-minded  
run-down  
second-class  
second-rate

shop-soiled  
short-handed  
short-lived  
short-sighted  
short-tempered  
slow-witted  
smooth-talking  
soft-hearted  
starry-eyed  
strong-minded  
stuck-up  
sun-tanned  
swollen-headed  
tender-hearted  
thick-skinned  
tongue-tied  
top-heavy  
trouble-free  
two-edged  
two-faced  
warm-hearted  
well-balanced  
well-behaved  
well-dressed  
well-known  
well-off  
wind-blown  
worldly-wise  
wrong-headed

**2.98** Here is a list of compound classifying adjectives:

air-conditioned

all-out

all-powerful

audio-visual

blue-blooded

bow-legged

brand-new

breast-fed

broken-down

broken-hearted

built-up

bullet-proof

burnt-out

cast-off

clean-shaven

cross-Channel

cross-country

cut-price

deep-sea

deep-seated

double-barrelled

double-breasted

drip-dry

drive-in

duty-bound

duty-free

empty-handed

face-saving

far-flung

first-class

free-range  
free-standing  
freeze-dried  
front-page  
full-blown  
full-face  
full-grown  
full-length  
full-scale  
gilt-edged  
grey-haired  
half-price  
half-yearly  
hand-picked  
high-heeled  
home-made  
ice-cold  
interest-free  
knee-deep  
last-minute  
late-night  
lead-free  
left-handed  
life-size  
long-distance  
long-lost  
long-range  
loose-leaf  
made-up  
man-eating  
mass-produced

middle-aged  
never-ending  
north-east  
north-west  
nuclear-free  
odds-on  
off-guard  
off-peak  
one-way  
open-ended  
open-mouthed  
panic-stricken  
part-time  
present-day  
purpose-built  
ready-made  
record-breaking  
red-brick  
remote-controlled  
right-angled  
right-handed  
second-class  
second-hand  
see-through  
silver-plated  
single-handed  
so-called  
so-so  
south-east  
south-west  
strong-arm

tax-free  
tone-deaf  
top-secret  
unheard-of  
wide-awake  
world-famous  
worn-out  
year-long

## compound colour adjectives

**2.99** Here is a list of compound colour adjectives:

blood-red  
blue-black  
bottle-green  
dove-grey  
electric-blue  
flesh-coloured  
ice-blue  
iron-grey  
jet-black  
lime-green  
navy-blue  
nut-brown  
off-white  
pea-green  
pearl-grey  
royal-blue  
shocking-pink  
sky-blue  
snow-white

## long compound adjectives

**2.100** A few compound adjectives are made up of more than two words. Compounds of three or more words are often written with hyphens when they are used in front of nouns, and without hyphens when they are used after a linking verb.

...the day-to-day chores of life.

...a down-to-earth approach.

...a free-and-easy relationship.

...life-and-death decisions.

...a trip to an out-of-the-way resort.

Their act is out of date.

**2.101** Some compound adjectives seem rather odd because they contain words that are never used as single words on their own, for example *namby-pamby*, *higgledy-piggledy*, and *topsy-turvy*. Words like these are usually informal.

...all that artsy-craftsy spiritualism.

...his la-di-da family.

## foreign compound adjectives

**2.102** Some compound adjectives are borrowed from foreign languages, especially from French and Latin.

...the arguments once used to defend laissez-faire economics.

...their present per capita fuel consumption.

In the commercial theatre, almost every production is ad hoc.

Here is a list of compound adjectives borrowed from other languages:

à la mode

a posteriori

a priori

ad hoc

ad lib

au fait

avant-garde

bona fide

compos mentis

cordon bleu

de facto

de jure  
de luxe  
de rigueur  
de trop  
ex gratia  
hors de combat  
infra dig  
laissez-faire  
non compos mentis  
per capita  
prima facie  
pro rata  
sub judice

## Comparing things: comparatives

**2.103** You can describe something by saying that it has more of a quality than something else. You do this by using **comparative adjectives**. Only qualitative adjectives usually have comparatives, but a few colour adjectives also have them. Comparatives normally consist of the usual form of the adjective with either *-er* added to the end, as in *harder* and *smaller*, or *more* placed in front, as in *more interesting* and *more flexible*.

Note that *good* and *bad* have the irregular comparative forms *better* and *worse*. The patterns for forming regular and irregular comparatives are explained in the Reference Section.

### in front of a noun

**2.104** Comparatives can be used as **modifiers** in front of a noun.

*The family moved to a smaller home.*

*He dreams of a better, more exciting life.*

*A harder mattress often helps with back injuries.*

Note that comparatives can also be used as modifiers in front of *one*.

*An understanding of this reality provokes a better one.*

### after a linking verb

**2.105** Comparatives can also be used after a **linking verb**.

*The ball soaked up water and became heavier.*

*His breath became quieter.*

*We need to be more flexible.*

The use of adjectives after linking verbs is explained in paragraphs 3.132 to 3.137.

## structures used after comparatives

**2.106** Comparatives are often followed by *than* when you want to specify what the other thing involved in the comparison is. You say exactly what you are comparing by using one of a number of structures after *than*.

These structures can be

► noun phrases

*Charlie was more honest than his predecessor.*

*...an area bigger than Mexico.*

Note that when *than* is followed by a pronoun on its own, the pronoun must be an object pronoun such as *me*, *him*, or *her*.

*My brother is younger than me.*

*Lamin was shorter than her.*

► phrases that start with a preposition

*The changes will be even more striking in the case of teaching than in medicine.*

*The odds of surviving childhood in New York City are worse than in some Third World countries.*

► clauses

*I would have done a better job than he did.*

*I was a better writer than he was.*

*He's taller than I am.*

Note that when a comparative is not followed by a *than* phrase, the other thing in the comparison should be obvious. For example, if someone says *Could I have a bigger one, please?* they are likely to be holding the item that they think is too small.

*A mattress would be better.*

## position of comparatives

**2.107** If you choose a phrase or clause beginning with *than* when you are using a comparative in front of a noun, you usually put the phrase or clause after the whole noun phrase, not directly after the comparative.

*The world is a more dangerous place than it was.*

*Willy owned a larger collection of books than anyone else I have ever met.*

A comparative can also come immediately after a noun, but only when it is followed by *than* and a noun phrase.

*We've got a rat bigger than a cat living in our roof.*  
*...packs of cards larger than he was used to.*

### more and more than

**2.108** *More* is sometimes used in front of a whole noun phrase to show that something has more of the qualities of one thing than another, or is one thing rather than being another.

*Music is more a way of life than an interest.*

*This is more a war movie than a western.*

Note that *more than* is used before adjectives for emphasis.

*Their life may be horribly dull, but they are more than satisfied.*

*You would be more than welcome.*

### comparatives used as nouns

**2.109** Comparative adjectives are sometimes used as noun-type words in fairly formal English. In such phrases, you put *the* in front of it, and follow it with *of* and a noun phrase that refers to the two things being compared.

*...the shorter of the two lines.*

*Dorothea was the more beautiful of the two.*

*There are two windmills, the larger of which stands a hundred feet high.*

If it is clear what you are talking about, you can omit *of* and the following noun phrase.

*Notice to quit must cover the rental period or four weeks, whichever is the longer.*

### less

**2.110** The form that is used to say that something does not have as much of a quality as something else is *less* followed by an adjective.

*The answer had been less truthful than his own.*

You can also use *less* and an adjective to say that something does not have as much of a quality as it had before.

*As the days went by, Sita became less anxious.*

Note that *less than* is used before adjectives to express a negative idea.

*It would have been less than fair.*

### contrasted comparatives

**2.111** You show that one amount of a quality or thing is linked to another amount

by using two contrasted comparatives preceded by *the*.

*The smaller it is, the cheaper it is to post.*

*The more militant we became, the less confident she became.*

*The larger the organization, the less scope there is for decision.*

## Comparing things: superlatives

**2.112** Another way of describing something is to say that it has more of a quality than anything else of its kind. You do this by using a **superlative adjective**. Only qualitative adjectives usually have superlatives, but a few colour adjectives also have them. Superlatives normally consist of either *-est* added to the end of an adjective and *the* placed in front of it, as in *the hardest* and *the smallest*, or of *the most* placed in front of the adjective, as in *the most interesting* and *the most flexible*.

Note that *good* and *bad* have the irregular superlative forms *the best* and *the worst*.

The patterns for forming regular and irregular superlatives of adjectives are explained in the Reference Section.

Note that superlative adjectives are nearly always preceded by *the*, because you are talking about something definite. Occasionally, when superlatives are used after a linking verb, *the* is omitted (see paragraph 2.117).



### BE CAREFUL

**2.113** Adjectives with *most* in front of them are not always superlatives. *Most* can also mean *very*.

*This book was most interesting.*

*My grandfather was a most extraordinary man.*

Words like *very* and *rather* are called **submodifying adverbs**. These are explained in paragraphs 2.140 to 2.156.

### used in front of a noun

**2.114** Superlatives can be used as **modifiers** in front of a noun.

*He was the cleverest man I ever knew.*

*It was the most exciting summer of their lives.*

*She came out of the thickest part of the crowd.*

*Now we come to the most important thing.*

*...the oldest rock paintings in North America.*

*...the most eminent scientists in Britain.*

Note that superlatives are also used as modifiers in front of *one*.

*No one ever used the smallest one.*

## used after a linking verb

**2.115** Superlatives are also used after a **linking verb**.

*He was the youngest.*

*The sergeant was the tallest.*

The use of adjectives after linking verbs is explained in paragraphs 3.132 to 3.137.

## structures used after superlatives

**2.116** You can use a superlative on its own if it is clear what is being compared. For example, if you say *Paul was the tallest*, you are referring to a group of people that has already been identified.

If you need to refer to the point of the comparison, you use a phrase or clause that consists of

- phrases that start with a preposition, usually *in* or *of*

*Henry was the biggest of them.*

*The third requirement is the most important of all.*

*These cakes are probably the best in the world.*

Note that if the superlative is placed in front of a noun, the preposition comes after the noun.

*...the best hotel for families.*

*I'm in the worst business in the world.*

- a relative clause

*It's the best I'm likely to get.*

*The waiting room was the worst I had seen.*

Note that if the superlative is placed in front of a noun, the relative clause comes after the noun.

*That's the most convincing answer that you've given me.*

## USAGE NOTE

**2.117** You usually put *the* in front of the superlative, but you can occasionally omit it, especially in informal speech or writing.

*Wool and cotton blankets are generally cheapest.*

*It can be used by whoever is closest.*

However, you cannot omit *the* when the superlative is followed by *of* or another structure showing what group of things you are comparing. So, for example, you can say *Amanda was the youngest of our group* or *Amanda was the youngest* or *Amanda was youngest*, but you cannot say *Amanda was youngest of our group*.

You can sometimes use the possessive form of a noun or a possessive determiner instead of *the* in front of a superlative. Often the possessive form of a noun is used instead of a phrase beginning with a preposition. For example, you can say *Britain's oldest man* instead of *the oldest man in Britain*.

...the world's most popular cheese.

...my newest assistant.

The possessive form of nouns is explained in paragraphs 1.211 to 1.222, and possessive determiners are explained in paragraphs 1.194 to 1.210.

### used with other adjectives

**2.118** A superlative is sometimes accompanied by another adjective ending in *-able* or *-ible*. This second adjective can be placed either between the superlative and the noun or after the noun.

...the narrowest imaginable range of interests.

...the most beautiful scenery imaginable.

...the longest possible gap.

I say that in the nicest way possible.

### superlatives used as nouns

**2.119** Superlative adjectives are sometimes used like nouns in fairly formal English. When you use a superlative adjective in this way, you put *the* in front of it, and follow it with *of* and a noun or pronoun that refers to the things being compared. When superlative adjectives are used in this way they can refer to one thing or to more than one.

*They are often too poor to buy or rent even the cheapest of houses.*

*He made several important discoveries.*


*The most interesting of these came from an examination of an old manuscript.*

If it is clear what you are talking about, you can omit *of* and the following noun phrase.

*There are three types of ant-eater.*

*The smallest lives entirely in trees.*

### USAGE NOTE

**2.120**  In informal speech, people often use a superlative rather than a comparative when they are talking about two things. For example, someone might say *The train is quickest* rather than *The train is quicker* when comparing a train service with a bus service. However, some people think that it is better to use superlatives only when comparing more than two things.

### used with ordinal numbers: *the second biggest city*

**2.121 Ordinal numbers** are used with superlatives to show that something has more of a quality than nearly all other things of their kind. For example, if you say that a mountain is *the second highest mountain*, you mean that it is higher than any other mountain except the highest one.

*Cancer is the second biggest cause of death in Britain.*

*...the second most important man in her life, her hairdresser.*

*It is Japan's third largest city.*

Ordinal numbers are explained in paragraphs [2.232](#) to [2.239](#).

### *the least*

**2.122** When you want to show that something has less of a quality than anything else, you use *the least* followed by an adjective.

*This is the least popular branch of medicine.*

Similarly, when you are talking about a group of things that have less of a quality than other things of their kind, you use *the least*.

*...the least savage men in the country.*

## Other ways of comparing things: saying that things are similar

**2.123** Another way of describing things is by saying that something is similar in some way to something else.

### talking about things with the same quality

**2.124** If you want to say that a thing or person has as much of a quality as something or someone else, you can use a structure based on the word *as* in front of a qualitative adjective. Usually this adjective is followed by a phrase or clause that also begins with *as*.

This can be

- ▶ a phrase beginning with the preposition *as*

*You're just as bad as your sister.*

*...huge ponds as big as tennis courts.*

*Takings were as high as ever.*

- ▶ a clause introduced by *as*

*Conversation was not as slow as I feared it would be.*

*The village gardens aren't as good as they used to be.*

**2.125** When this comparative structure is followed by a phrase consisting of *as* and a pronoun on its own, the pronoun must be an object pronoun such as *me*, *him*, or *her*.

*Jane was not as clever as him.*

However, when the comparative structure is followed by a clause consisting of

as and a pronoun that is the subject of a clause, then that pronoun must be a subject pronoun such as *I*, *he* or *she*.

*They aren't as clever as they appear to be.*

- 2.126** If it is clear what you are comparing something or someone to, you can omit the phrase or clause.

*Frozen peas are just as good.*

- 2.127** You can also use the *as...as...* structure to say that something has much more or less of a quality than something else. You do this by putting an expression such as *twice*, *three times*, *ten times*, or *half* in front of the first *as*. For example, if one building is ten metres high and another building is twenty metres high, you can say that the second building is *twice as high as* the first building or that the first building is *half as high as* the second one.

*The grass was twice as tall as in the rest of the field.*

*Water is eight hundred times as dense as air.*

This structure is often used in the same way to refer to qualities that cannot be measured. For example, if you want to say that something is much more useful than something else, you can say that the first thing is *a hundred times as useful as* the second one.

*Without this help, rearing our children would be ten times as hard as it is.*

#### USAGE NOTE

- 2.128** When the *as...as...* structure is preceded by *not*, it has the same meaning as *less...than*. For example, *I am not as tall as George* means the same as *I am less tall than George*. Some people use *not so...as...* instead of *not as...as...*

*The film is not as good as the book.*

*The young otter is not so handsome as the old.*

- 2.129** Words like *just*, *quite*, *nearly* and *almost* can be used in front of this comparative structure, modifying the comparison with their usual meanings.

*Sunburn can be just as severe as a heat burn.*

The use of these words in comparison is explained in paragraphs [2.157](#) to [2.168](#).

- 2.130** When you are using the *as...as...* structure you sometimes put a noun after the adjective and before the following phrase or clause. This noun must begin with *a* or *an*. For example, instead of saying *This knife is as good as that one*, you can say *This is as good a knife as that one*.

*I'm as good a cook as she is.*

*This was not as bad a result as they expected.*

Sometimes, instead of using *not* before this structure, you use *not such* followed by *a* or *an*, an adjective, a noun, and *as*.

Water is not such a good conductor as metal.

- 2.131** Instead of using this *as...as...* structure you can use expressions such as *the height of* and *the size of* to show that something is as big as something else, or bigger or smaller.

*The tumour was the size of a golf ball.*

*It is roughly the length of a man's arm.*

### like

- 2.132** If something has similar qualities or features to something else, instead of using the *as...as...* comparative structure you can say that the first thing is *like* the second one. You do this by using phrases beginning with *like* after **linking verbs**.

*He looked like an actor.*

*That sounds like an exaggeration.*

*The whole thing is like a bad dream.*

Here is a list of the linking verbs used with *like*:

be

feel

look

seem

smell

sound

taste

When you want to say that one thing resembles another, you can use a phrase beginning with *like* after these linking verbs.

*It was like a dream.*

*Sometimes I feel like a prisoner here.*

*He looked like a nice man.*

*The houses seemed like mansions.*

*You smell like a tramp!*

*It sounded like a fine idea.*

- 2.133** *Like* has the comparative *more like* and *less like*, and the superlative *most like* and *least like*.

*It made her seem less like a child.*

*Of all his children, she was the one most like me.*

**2.134** You can use words like *exactly* and *just* in front of *like*.

*He looks just like a baby.*

*She looked like a queen, just exactly like a queen*

This is explained in paragraph [2.165](#).

### **same as**

**2.135** If you want to say that one thing is exactly like something else, you can say that it is *the same as* the other thing.

*The rich are the same as the rest of us.*

*The same as* can be followed by a noun phrase, a pronoun, or a clause.

*24 Spring Terrace was the same as all its neighbours.*

*Her colouring was the same as mine.*

*The furnishings are not exactly the same as they were when we lived there.*

If two or more things are exactly like each other, you can say that they are *the same*.

*Come and look! They're exactly the same.*

*They both taste the same.*

You use *the same* when you are comparing people or things with other people or things that you have just mentioned.

*It looks like a calculator and weighs about the same.*

*The message was the same.*

*The end result is the same.*

Note that you use *the opposite* and *the reverse* in a similar way.

*The kind of religious thoughts I had were just the opposite.*

*Some people think that a healthy diet is expensive, but in fact the reverse is true.*

**2.136** You can use words like *nearly* and *exactly* in front of *the same as* and *the same*.

*They are virtually the same as other single cells.*

*You two look exactly the same.*

Here is a list of words used in the same way with *the same as* and *the same*:

almost

exactly

just

more or less  
much  
nearly  
virtually

These words are explained in paragraphs 2.140 to 2.168.

**2.137** You can put a noun such as *size*, *length*, or *colour* after *the same*. For example, if you want to say that one street is as long as another one, you can say that the first street is *the same length* as the second one, or that the two streets are *the same length*.

*Its brain was about the same size as that of a gorilla.*

*They were almost the same height.*

### adjectives meaning *the same*

**2.138** The adjectives *alike*, *comparable*, *equivalent*, *identical*, and *similar* are also used to say that two or more things are like each other. You can put the preposition *to* after all of them except *alike* in order to mention the second of the things being compared.

*They all looked alike.*

*The houses were all identical.*

*Flemish is similar to Afrikaans.*

### modifying adjectives used in comparisons

**2.139** When you want to suggest that you are comparing different amounts of a quality, you can use words like *comparatively*, *relatively*, and *equally*.

*Psychology's a comparatively new subject.*

*The costs remained relatively low.*

*Her technique was less dramatic than Ann's, but equally effective.*

*He was extra polite to his superiors.*

## Talking about different amounts of a quality

**2.140** When you want to say something more about the quality that an adjective describes, you can use a **submodifying adverb** such as *very* or *rather* with it. You do this in order to indicate the amount of the quality, or to intensify it.

### submodifying adverbs: *extremely narrow*, *slightly different*

**2.141** Because qualitative adjectives are **gradable**, allowing you to say how much or how little of the quality is relevant, you are more likely to use **submodifying adverbs** (words like *extremely* or *slightly*) with them than with

other types of adjective.

...*an extremely narrow road.*

...*a highly successful company.*

...*in a slightly different way.*

*I was extraordinarily happy.*

...*helping them in a strongly supportive way.*

...*a very pretty girl.*

*She seems very pleasant.*

...*a rather clumsy person.*

*His hair was rather long.*

**2.142** You can use words like *very* and *extremely* with some classifying adjectives (see paragraphs 2.146 to 2.148) and with colour adjectives (see paragraph 2.35). Note that most -ed adjectives can be modified by words such as *very* and *extremely*, just like other qualitative adjectives.

...*a very frightened little girl.*

...*an extremely disappointed young man.*

### intensifying qualitative adjectives

**2.143** You can use many submodifying adverbs like *very* or *extremely* with qualitative adjectives in order to intensify their meaning.

...*extremely high temperatures.*

*Geoffrey was a deeply religious man.*

*France is heavily dependent on foreign trade.*

Here is a list of words used to intensify the meaning of adjectives:

amazingly

awfully

bitterly

critically

dangerously

deeply

delightfully

disturbingly

dreadfully

eminently

especially

exceedingly  
extraordinarily  
extremely  
fantastically  
greatly  
heavily  
highly  
hopelessly  
horribly  
hugely  
impossibly  
incredibly  
infinitely  
notably  
particularly  
radically  
really  
remarkably  
seriously  
strikingly  
supremely  
surprisingly  
suspiciously  
terribly  
unbelievably  
very  
violently  
vitally  
wildly  
wonderfully

Note that *very* can be used in front of superlative adjectives when you want to

be very emphatic. This is explained in paragraphs [2.167](#) to [2.168](#).

**2.144** Many of these submodifying adverbs not only intensify the meaning of the adjective but also allow you to express your opinion about what you are saying. For example, if you say that something is *surprisingly large*, you are expressing surprise at how large it is as well as intensifying the meaning of *large*.

*He has amazingly long eyelashes.*

*...a delightfully refreshing taste.*

*...a shockingly brutal scene.*

*...a horribly uncomfortable chair.*

*...incredibly boring documents.*

However, you use a few of these submodifying adverbs with no other purpose than to intensify the meaning of the adjective.

*They're awfully brave.*

*The other girls were dreadfully dull companions.*

Here is a list of words only used to intensify adjectives:

awfully  
dreadfully  
especially  
extremely  
greatly  
highly  
really  
so  
terribly  
very

Note that *awfully*, *dreadfully*, and *terribly* are used in informal language and *highly* is used in very formal language.

Note also that *so* is normally only used after a linking verb.

*I am so sorry.*

### reducing qualitative adjectives

**2.145** Some submodifying adverbs are used to reduce the effect of qualitative adjectives.

*The story was mildly amusing.*  
*It's a fairly common feeling.*  
*...moderately rich people.*  
*...his rather large stomach.*  
*My last question is somewhat personal.*

Here is a list of words used to reduce the effect of an adjective:

faintly  
fairly  
mildly  
moderately  
pretty  
quite  
rather  
reasonably  
slightly  
somewhat

Note also that *quite* is normally only used with adjectives that are used after a linking verb.

*She was quite tall.*

### talking about extent

**2.146** Some modifying adverbs are used to talk about the extent of the quality that you are describing.

Here is a list of words used to talk about the extent of a quality:

almost  
exclusively  
fully  
largely  
mainly  
mostly  
nearly

partly  
predominantly  
primarily  
roughly  
~  
absolutely  
altogether  
completely  
entirely  
perfectly  
purely  
quite  
simply  
totally  
utterly

#### USAGE NOTE

**2.147** The first group in the list above are used almost always just to talk about the extent of a quality. They are most commonly used with classifying adjectives.

*It was an almost automatic reflex.*

*...a shop with an exclusively female clientele.*

*...the largely rural south east.*

*The wolf is now nearly extinct.*

*The reasons for this were partly economic and practical, and partly political and social.*

*Almost and nearly are also used with qualitative adjectives.*

*The club was almost empty.*

*It was nearly dark.*

Note that *roughly* can be used when you want to say that something is nearly or approximately like something else.

*West Germany, Japan and Sweden are at roughly similar levels of economic development.*

Note also that *half* is sometimes used in this way. For example, you can describe someone as *half American* if just one of their parents was American.

**2.148** The second group in the list above are used not only to talk about the extent

of a quality but also to emphasize the adjective. They are used with classifying adjectives as well as qualitative adjectives.

*You're absolutely right.*

*This policy has been completely unsuccessful.*

*Everyone appeared to be completely unaware of the fact.*

*The discussion was purely theoretical.*

*It really is quite astonishing.*

*...a totally new situation.*

*We lived totally separate lives.*

*...utterly trivial matters.*

Note that *absolutely* is frequently used with qualitative adjectives that express enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm. When you use *absolutely* in this way you are emphasizing how strongly you feel about what you are saying.

*...an absolutely absurd idea.*

*I think it's absolutely wonderful.*

*The enquiry is absolutely crucial.*

Here is a list of qualitative adjectives often emphasized by *absolutely*:

absurd

awful

brilliant

certain

crucial

enormous

essential

excellent

furious

hilarious

huge

impossible

massive

perfect

ridiculous

splendid

terrible

vital  
wonderful

Note also that *completely* and *utterly* can also be used in this way.

*It is completely impossible to imagine such a world.*

*He began to feel utterly miserable.*

### saying that there is enough of something

**2.149** You can use submodifying adverbs such as *adequately*, *sufficiently*, and *acceptably* when you want to say that someone or something has enough of the quality you are describing.

*The roof is adequately insulated.*

*We found a bank of snow sufficiently deep to dig a cave.*

### USAGE NOTE

**2.150** You can also show that you think something is sufficient by using *enough*. *Enough* always comes after the adjective, and never before it.

*I was not a good enough rider.*

*It seemed that Henry had not been careful enough.*

*Enough* can be followed by the preposition *for* to indicate a person involved, or by a *to*-infinitive to indicate a related action.

*A girl from the factory wasn't good enough for him.*

*If you find that the white wine is not cold enough for you, ask for some ice to be put in it.*

*The children are old enough to travel to school on their own.*

*None of the fruit was ripe enough to eat.*

Note that when *enough* is used after an adjective, you can use *just* in front of the adjective to show that someone or something has enough of the quality described by the adjective, but no more than that.

*Some of these creatures are just large enough to see with the naked eye.*

**2.151** *Enough* is also a determiner (see paragraphs 1.223 to 1.247).

*He hasn't had enough exercise.*

When *enough* is a determiner, it can have a word like *just* or *almost* in front of it.

*There was just enough space for a bed.*

*I have almost enough tokens for one book.*

### saying that there is not enough of something

**2.152** If you want to show that you think something you are describing is insufficient, you can use submodifying adverbs such as *inadequately*, *insufficiently*, and *unacceptably*.

*...people growing up in insufficiently supportive families.*  
*Their publications were inadequately researched.*

### saying that there is too much of something

**2.153** If you want to say that you think someone or something has too much of a quality, you normally use *too* in front of a qualitative adjective that is used after a linking verb.

*My feet are too big.*

*It was too hot.*

*Dad thought I was too idealistic.*

You can emphasize *too* by putting *far* in front of it. In informal English you can also use *way*.

*The journey was far too long.*

*It was far too hot to work in the garden.*

*The price was way too high.*

*Too* can be followed by the preposition *for* to indicate a person involved or by a *to*-infinitive to indicate a related action.

*The shoes were too big for him.*

*He was too old for that sort of thing.*

*She was too weak to lift me.*

*He was too proud to apologize.*

Note that you do not usually use *too* with an adjective in front of a noun, although you do use *too* in front of the determiners *many*, *much*, and *few*.

*There is too much chance of error.*

*Too few people nowadays are interested in literature.*

*You ask too many questions, Sam.*

### ! BE CAREFUL

**2.154** *Too* cannot be used instead of *very*. Rather than saying *I am too happy to meet you*, you must say *I am very happy to meet you*.

**2.155** Other words that indicate too much of a quality are *excessively*, *overly*, and the prefix *over-*. These can be used, like *too*, with adjectives that come after a linking verb, but they can also be used with adjectives in front of a noun.

*...excessively high accident rates.*

*...an intellectual but over-cautious man.*

*They were overly eager.*



**2.156** As well as adverbs of degree like *excessively* and *insufficiently*, you can use some other types of adverb in front of adjectives to modify their meaning.

...*the once elegant palace.*

...*a permanently muddy road.*

...*internationally famous golfers.*

...*naturally blonde hair.*

...*coolly elegant furniture.*

...*purposely expensive gadgets.*

Adverbs are explained in [Chapter 6](#).

## Saying things are different

**2.157** When you are using comparative adjectives, you may want to say that something has much more or much less of a quality than something else. You do this by adding words like *much* or *a little*.

*It is a much better school than yours.*

*These creatures are much less mobile.*

*There are far worse dangers.*

*Some children are a lot more difficult than others.*

You also use these words to say that something has much more or much less of a quality than it had before.

*He had become much more mature.*

*That's much less important than it was.*

**2.158** Some modifying words and phrases are only used when comparative adjectives are being used after linking verbs.

*You look a lot better.*

*It would be a good deal easier if you came to my place.*

*The journey back was a great deal more unpleasant than the outward one had been.*

Here is a list of modifying words and phrases used in front of comparative adjectives after a linking verb:

a good deal

a great deal

a lot

heaps

lots

Note that *lots* and *heaps* are only used in informal spoken English.

- 2.159** However, other submodifying adverbs can be used with comparative adjectives that are being used either in front of a noun or after a linking verb.

*They are faced with a much harder problem than the rest of us.*

*The risk from smoking is much greater if you have a weak heart.*

*Computers can be applied to a far wider range of tasks.*

*The delay was far longer than they claimed.*

Here is a list of submodifying adverbs used with adjectives that are used both in front of a noun and after a linking verb:

considerably

far

infinitely

much

vastly

very much



#### USAGE NOTE

- 2.160** If you want to say that something has more of a quality than something else that already has a lot of it, you use *even* or *still* before a comparative adjective, or *still* after it.

*She's even lazier than me!*

*She was even more possessive than Rosamund.*

*I had a still more recent report.*

*The text is actually worse still.*

Similarly, you use *even* or *still* to say that something has less of a quality than something else that has little of this quality.

*This did not happen before the war, and is now even less likely.*

You also use *even* or *still* when comparing the amount of a quality that something has at one time with the amount that it has at another.

*The flight was even faster coming back.*

*They will become richer still.*

In formal or literary English, *yet* is sometimes used in the same way as *still*.

*He would have been yet more alarmed had she withdrawn.*

*The planes grow mightier yet.*

- 2.161** You can show that something has an increasing or decreasing amount of a

quality by repeating comparative adjectives. For example, you can say that something is getting *bigger and bigger*, *more and more difficult*, or *less and less common*.

*He's getting taller and taller.*

*...defences that were proving more and more effective.*

*Increasingly* can be used instead of *more and more* and *decreasingly* instead of *less and less*.

*I was becoming increasingly depressed.*

*It was the first of a number of increasingly frank talks.*

- 2.162** If you want to say that something has a little more or a little less of a quality than something else, you use *rather*, *slightly*, *a bit*, *a little bit*, or *a little* with comparative adjectives.

*It's a rather more complicated story than that.*

*She's only a little bit taller than her sister.*

You also use these forms to say that something has a little more or a little less of a quality than it had before.

*We must be rather more visible to people in the community.*

*...the little things that made life slightly less intolerable.*

- 2.163** If you want to say emphatically that something has no more of a quality than something else or than it had before, you can use *no* in front of comparative adjectives.

*Some species of dinosaur were no bigger than a chicken.*

*Any* is used for emphasis in front of comparatives in negative clauses, questions, and conditional clauses. For example, *He wasn't any taller than Jane* means the same as *He was no taller than Jane*.

*I was ten and didn't look any older.*

*If it will make you any happier, I'll shave off my beard.*

*Is that any clearer?*

Note that you only use *no* and *any* like this when comparatives are being used after a linking verb. You cannot use *no* and *any* with comparatives when they are being used in front of a noun phrase. For example, you cannot say *It was a no better meal* or *Is that an any faster train?*

- 2.164** When you use the comparative structure *as ... as ...* (see paragraphs 2.124 to 2.130), submodifying words such as *just*, *quite*, *nearly*, and *almost* can be used in front of it, modifying the comparison with their usual meanings.

*Mary was just as pale as he was.*

*There is nothing quite as lonely as illness.*

*...a huge bird which was nearly as big as a man.*

*The land seemed almost as dark as the water.*

*Nearly* is also used when the *as ... as ...* structure is preceded by *not* with the meaning *less.....than*. You put it after the *not*. For example, *I am not nearly as tall as George* means the same as *I am much less tall than George*.

*This is not nearly as complicated as it sounds.*

- 2.165** When you use *like* to describe someone or something by comparing them with someone or something else (see paragraphs 2.132 to 2.134), you can use a submodifying adverb in front of it.

*...animals that looked a little like donkeys.*

*It's a plane exactly like his.*

Here is a list of modifying words and phrases used with *like*:

a bit  
a little  
exactly  
just  
quite  
rather  
somewhat  
very

- 2.166** When you use *the same as* and *the same* to describe someone or something by saying they are identical to someone or something else, you can use a number of submodifying adverbs in front of them, including *just*, *exactly*, *much*, *nearly*, *virtually*, and *more or less*.

*I'm just the same as everyone else.*

*The situation was much the same in Germany.*

*The moral code would seem to be more or less the same throughout the world.*

- 2.167** When you are using superlative adjectives, you may wish to say that something has much more or much less of a quality than anything else of its kind.

The submodifying adverbs *much*, *quite*, *easily*, *by far*, and *very* can be used with the superlative adjectives.

*Much*, *quite*, and *easily* are placed in front of *the* and the superlative.

*Music may have been much the most respectable of his tastes. ...the most frightening time of my life, and quite the most dishonest.*

*This is easily the best film of the year.*

*By far* can be placed either in front of *the* and the superlative or after the superlative.

*They are by far the most dangerous creatures on the island. The Union was the largest by far.*

- 2.168** *Very* is only used with superlatives formed by adding *-est* or with irregular superlatives such as *the best* and *the worst*. *Very* is placed between *the* and the superlative.

*...the very earliest computers.*

*It was of the very highest quality.*

*Very* is also used to modify superlative adjectives when you want to be very emphatic. It is placed after a determiner such as *the* or *that* and in front of a superlative adjective or one such as *first* or *last*.

*...in the very smallest countries.*

*...one of the very finest breeds of dogs.*

*...on the very first day of the war.*

*He had come at the very last moment.*

*That very next afternoon he was working in his room.*

*He spent weeks in that very same basement.*

## Modifying using nouns: noun modifiers

- 2.169** Nouns can be used as modifiers in front of other nouns when you want to give more specific information about someone or something.

Sometimes, when nouns are used like this they become fixed expressions called **compound nouns** (see paragraphs 1.83 to 1.92).

When the nouns used in front of other nouns are not in fixed expressions, they are called **noun modifiers**.

*...the car door.*

*...tennis lessons.*

*...a football player.*

*...cat food.*

*...the music industry.*

*...a surprise announcement.*

## singular and plural forms

- 2.170** You normally use the singular form of a **countable noun** (see paragraphs 1.15 to 1.22) as a noun modifier, even when you are referring to more than one thing. For example, you refer to a shop that sells books as *a book shop*, not *a books shop*, even though it sells a large number of books, not just one. Many **plural nouns** lose their *-s* endings when used in front of other nouns.